

FACTS ABOUT HANTAVIRUS IN CALIFORNIA

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is a rare, but frequently fatal, illness currently being diagnosed in many parts of the country, including California. By taking the right precautions, you can minimize your risk of becoming infected with this rodent-borne virus.



SYMPTOMS OF HANTAVIRUS

The symptoms of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome include fever, headache, shortness of breath, severe muscle aches, coughing, vomiting, and abdominal pain. These symptoms may last a few hours to several days. As the illness progresses, the lungs fill with fluid, making breathing difficult. Respiratory failure can follow rapidly. Approximately 50% of the known patients have died.



What To Do If You Think You're Infected

- Contact your doctor immediately if you become ill with flu-like symptoms 1 to 6 weeks after exposure to rodents or their excretions.

What About a Hantavirus Cure?

- There is no specific treatment for hantavirus infection other than early diagnosis and good medical care.



- Spring-loaded snap traps and EPA-registered baits should be used continuously to kill rodents. Use traps appropriate for the size of rodent (small traps for mice, large traps for rats). **DO NOT USE LIVE TRAPS** because handling live rodents may significantly increase your risk of exposure to hantavirus.
- Discourage the use of rodenticides in dwellings that have not been rodent proofed. Rodents dying inside inaccessible places may expose occupants to undesirable odors and nuisance vectors.
- Prevent rodents from entering your home and work place by using steel wool or concrete in holes larger than 1/4 inch in diameter. Mice can fit through spaces the size of a dime!
- Place 3 inches of gravel under the base of buildings to discourage rodent burrowing.
- Place metal roof flashing around the base of buildings to act as a rodent barrier.
- Relocate woodpiles, vegetable gardens, trash cans, and animal feed at least 100 feet from human dwellings. Hay bales, woodpiles, and trash cans should sit at least 12 inches off the ground.

Remember to keep baits and traps out of the reach of children and pets.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FOR

WHICH ANIMALS CARRY HANTAVIRUS?

The most important wild rodent in California that carries the virus is the deer mouse. It is 4 to 7



inches long from head to tail, grey to brown in color with white fur on the belly and underside of tail, and has large ears.

Infectious deer mice do not appear to show any signs of illness. There is no way to tell an infected rodent from a noninfected rodent just by looking at it. It is also difficult to tell deer mice from other rodents.

Therefore, all rodents should be treated as potentially infectious and handled with proper precautions.

Deer mice are abundant in rural and semirural areas of California. These mice will readily enter people's homes, work places, and other buildings for food and shelter. You can tell if a building is rodent infested by sighting live mice (especially at night) or carcasses, droppings, urine stains, nests, or signs of rodent chewing.

Pets, such as dogs, cats, hamsters, and birds, are not known to transmit hantavirus to people.

EXPOSURE TO HANTAVIRUS

A person can be infected by inhaling airborne particles of urine, droppings, or saliva from infected rodents. The virus may also be spread by touching the nose, mouth, or eyes after handling infected rodents, their nests, or droppings. People may also become infected after being bitten by rodents.

RISKS OF HANTAVIRUS

Hantavirus illness does not appear to be limited to any age, race, or ethnic group. The illness has occurred in various ethnic groups, in young people as well as adults, and in both males and females. Deer mice infected with hantavirus have been found in most geographical regions of California.

Your highest risk of contracting hantavirus comes from exposure to rodent droppings or secretions. Most cases have been acquired in rural and semirural settings where deer mice commonly invade human dwellings. Activities which pose the highest risk include:

- occupying or cleaning rodent-infested barns, sheds, or abandoned dwellings
- disturbing rodent-inhabited areas while hiking or camping
- living in or visiting areas where there has been an increase in the rodent population
- working in enclosed spaces infested with rodents

Where You Live and Work

Because hantavirus is still a rare illness, there should be no cause for panic.

Learning how to avoid rodents and their excretions could be the best defense against hantavirus.

Rodents occupy areas in and around human dwellings looking for food, water, and shelter. You can reduce your risk of exposure at home and work by taking the following precautions:

- Keep food in sealed containers or in the refrigerator.
- Clean up spilled food immediately. Use garbage containers with tight-fitting lids.
- Do not leave pet food out overnight.



CLEANUP

Remember that hantavirus is transmitted primarily by inhalation of aerosols contaminated with virus from rodent secretions. Therefore, it is very important to avoid creating aerosols while cleaning.

- Ventilate the affected area the night before cleanup by opening doors and windows.
- Use rubber gloves.
- Apply household disinfectants at maximum recommended concentration to dead rodents, rodent droppings, nests, contaminated traps and surrounding area and allow for at least 15 minutes contact time before removal.
- Clean the affected area with paper towels or a mop. **DO NOT SWEEP OR VACUUM.**
- Double bag the disinfectant-soaked rodent and clean-up material (newspaper, paper towels, etc.) securely in plastic bags and seal.
- Before removing gloves, wash gloved hands in disinfectant, and then in soap and water. Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water after removing the gloves. Dispose of gloves and clean-up materials with other household waste.



Where You Camp or Hike

- All cabins should be well ventilated and aired-out before being occupied. Inspect for rodents and do not use cabins if you find signs of rodent infestation until building is cleaned up following appropriate safety precautions.
- Check the area for rodent droppings and burrows before sleeping outdoors.
- Do not disturb rodents, burrows, or dens.
- Avoid sleeping near woodpiles or garbage areas that may be frequented by rodents.
- Avoid sleeping on bare ground; use elevated cots or mats if available.
- Store food in rodent-proof containers and promptly discard all garbage.

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Educational Handouts

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